



## **One in five Rhode Island children lives in poverty, survey finds**

**Nationwide, Rhode Island has the third-highest percentage of children living in single-parent households, according to the survey by Rhode Island Kids Count.**

**02:28 PM EDT on Monday, April 3, 2006**

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To break the cycle of poverty, poor children in Rhode Island need support from the state and the community, Rhode Island Kids Count says in a report scheduled for release today. "We must be vigilant in our work to ensure that federal and state resources are used to improve the health, education and development of our children," Tamara Lucas Copeland, president of Voices for America's Children, said in a statement accompanying the report. "Public investments in children and their families are a key factor in the quality of life in our communities and our nation."

Copeland will speak this morning at a breakfast in Warwick to announce the release of Kids Count's 2006 factbook, which analyzes 60 aspects of the well being of children in Rhode Island. Of the New England states, Rhode Island has the highest percentage of children living in single-parent homes -- 34 percent, compared with a national rate of 25 percent. In fact, Rhode Island's percentage is the third-highest in the nation, according to the report. Single-parent households in Rhode Island are nine times more likely to have incomes below the federal poverty level than are two-parent families, the report says. "Children who grow up in single-parent households are more likely to have nonmarital births, have discordant marriages and higher rates of divorce," continuing the cycle of poverty, it says.

In Rhode Island, 21 percent of children live in households with incomes below the poverty level defined by the U.S. Office of Management and Budget. (That level is currently \$15,735 for a family of three.) Nationally, 18 percent of children live in poverty. The direct and indirect risks of poverty include malnutrition, exposure to environmental toxins, maternal depression, trauma and abuse, lower-quality childcare and parental substance abuse, the report said.

The report highlighted disparities between core cities -- defined as Providence, Pawtucket, Central Falls, Woonsocket, West Warwick and Newport -- and the rest of the state. In the last school year, 24 percent of students in core cities missed more than 20 days of school, while only 10 percent of students elsewhere missed that much, the report said. Children living in core cities also were significantly more likely to have asthma than children living elsewhere.

The report also found disparities in well being among racial and ethnic groups. In particular, Rhode Island's Latino population -- which grew by 13 percent between 2000

and 2004 -- has the lowest median income of any Latino population in the United States, the report says. Rhode Island's children do well on some health indicators -- for instance, Rhode Island does better than the national average when it comes to immunizations, and is second-lowest in the nation in the number of uninsured children.

But children here fare worse than the national average in other indicators -- for instance, 20 percent of Rhode Island children are overweight, compared with 16 percent nationally. The report found that 13 percent of Rhode Island public high-school students were obese in 2005, up from 10 percent in 2003. The incidence of lead poisoning in children decreased from 3.7 percent in 2004 to 3 percent in 2005, but still exceeded the national average of 1.6 percent.

The report's release comes amid contentious budget discussions at the State House. Kids Count representatives have testified at several budget hearings, asking the General Assembly to reject Carcieri's proposed cuts to welfare and RIte Care, which include ending coverage for most noncitizen children and lowering the income eligibility threshold for parents. The advocates argue that those proposals would eliminate support that helps children transcend poverty. Elizabeth Burke Bryant, executive director of Kids Count, reaffirmed that opposition in her introduction of the report. "It is critical that we preserve the investments we have made in insuring all of Rhode Island's children, including undocumented children," she said. "Children without health insurance often have poorer school attendance and lower school achievement. We also know . . . that children are more likely to use health care when their parents are insured and have access to health care."

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